

WHITHER THE SAVAGE MIND? NOTES ON THE NATURAL TAXONOMIES OF A HUNTING AND GATHERING PEOPLE

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A major premiss of Durkheimian sociology is that cultures with a low division of labour are characterised by integrated schemas (symbolic classifications) that unite into a 'totality' their various taxonomies. The suggestion is made that there is a class of hunter-gathering communities who do not fit neatly into this paradigm. In outlining the way one Indian community, the Hill Pandaram, orders, through its language categories, the biotic domain the article notes the unformalised nature of these taxonomies, the reliance this community places on memorate knowledge, the fact that the taxonomic elements have little symbolic import, and that the Hill Pandaram appear to have no symbolic 'ideologic' that links these natural taxonomies to other cultural domains. In discussing Douglas's work on taboo the article suggests the importance of separating folk taxonomies that order a specific domain from symbolic classifications; concluding, negatively, that dietary prohibitions do not correlate neatly with taxonomic ordering.

I

The present article is largely concerned with outlining the way in which one hunting and gathering community orders, through its language categories, the biotic world. I am concerned here however less with presenting ethnographic data, than in discussing my lack of them! Thus I am open to the charge of being incompetent as an ethnographer. This may well be the case, but my findings are sufficiently suggestive for me to draw some tentative conclusions about the nature of folk classifications, especially the degree to which such classifications may (or may not) be linked together by all-embracing symbolic taxonomies. Of equal interest, and this I explore in part III in discussing Douglas's seminal ideas on pollution beliefs, is the relationship between such classificatory systems and dietary restrictions.

In a highly stimulating work on the symbolic and taxonomic systems of pre-literate people Lévi-Strauss articulated a theoretical perspective which suggested that the classificatory schemas of these societies formed as it were a 'conceptual whole'. As he put it:

The societies which we call primitive do not have any conception of a sharp division between the various levels of classification . . . commonly zoological and botanical classifications do not constitute separate domains but form an integral part of an all-embracing dynamic taxonomy (1966: 138-9).

He was in fact suggesting that tribal cultures have a 'master plan', a symbolic or classificatory schema which links all other classificatory schemas (beliefs and customs) into an 'organised whole'. In essence this was his solution to the problem of totemism. But Lévi-Strauss tended to confuse, or at least conjoin, folk taxonomic

Man (N.S.) **11**, 542-557.

systems which order a particular domain, with symbolic classificatory schemas that unite aspects of several domains. In the terms of Durkheim and Mauss (1963) he did not distinguish between technological classifications and the symbolic classifications of a moral or religious nature. My concern here is not with 'totemism' *per se*. What interests me is the relative neglect in Lévi-Strauss's theoretical writings on symbolism, mythology and totemic phenomena of a whole *class* of hunter-gathering cultures. Why is it that Lévi-Strauss makes no mention for instance of the Great Basin Shoshone or the Semang? Why is it that in an important treatise on the mythology of South American Indians Lévi-Strauss makes so little reference to the Sirionó and the Nambicuara? We can hardly put such neglect down to a lack of ethnography or to oversight on the part of this important scholar; indeed Lévi-Strauss did fieldwork among the Nambicuara and has written several papers on this culture. Their neglect I suggest is rather a reflection of empirical reality. We have to accept the fact that many hunter-gathering communities, including perhaps the Nambicuara, deviate markedly from the type of society which this scholar attempts to portray in his work on the 'savage mind'. This is to suggest that many hunter-gatherers do not have an 'undifferentiated world-view' (Douglas 1966: 112); that their beliefs, customs and taxonomies are not systematised into an 'organic whole' such that various aspects of their culture are homologous; or putting it another way, that they do not have complex symbolic classifications or mythological systems that unite into a 'totality' their various systems of classification. The same point can be made by noting the following contrasts:

—between the 'cultural impoverishment' (Farb 1969: 16) of the Shoshone and the wealth of ceremonial and symbolism among the Pueblo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico.

—between the Nambicuara, and also the Sirionó who have a 'virtual lack of folklore and mythology' (Holmberg 1969: 116) and the more elaborate symbolism of the Bororo and Eastern Timbiri.

—between the Kadar and Hill Pandaram of South India who lack totemic systems and neighbouring shifting agriculturists such as the Kannikar (Krishna Iyer 1937).

—between the Andaman Islanders and such south-east Asian communities as the Semang and the Kubus for the latter have a relative disinterest in ritual ceremonial (Radcliffe-Brown 1964; Skeat & Blagden 1906; Loeb 1935: 285).

All the above hunter-gathering communities (with the notable exception of the Andaman Islanders) exemplify the type of society I am alluding to, constituting a specific cultural type which Gardner (1966) has termed 'individualistic culture'. The integral aspects of such a culture, this writer suggests, are a toleration of incest, a stress on symmetric relations, an avoidance of overt aggression, and, what is germane to the present discussion, a 'reliance upon an idiosyncratic ordering of reality' (1966: 409). The last aspect Gardner has generalised under the rubric of 'memorate knowledge'. The present article offers some ethnographic notes on the way in which one such hunter-gatherer community, the Hill Pandaram, orders the natural world. They are illustrative of a culture whose ideational patterns seem to me

to deviate substantially from the 'savage mind' paradigm quoted in the opening paragraphs. My purpose is to suggest that a much more discriminating approach to the study of the classificatory systems of pre-literate peoples should be made. I am not here concerned to explore the socio-economic conditions which might have given rise to such a cultural type, though Gardner has made an important even if tentative contribution to such an issue. Neither is it my purpose to offer suggestions towards an equally interesting problem, namely why certain, but by no means all, tribal or archaic communities have elaborate ideational patterns that link the diverse aspects of their culture into a single integrative totality¹—through myth, magic, totemic principles, or perhaps, a symbolic classificatory schema. My aim is essentially ethnographic and limited.

II

The Hill Pandaram, a tribal community of South India,² are nomadic hunter-gatherers whose livelihood primarily depends on the gathering of forest products, both for subsistence and for external trade—honey, meat and dammar resin being the main items bartered. Living in the forested hills south of Lake Periyar, to an important degree isolated from the caste Hindus of the plains, they number about a thousand individuals. Their population is widely dispersed through the hill forests, rarely more than twenty individuals associating together at any one time; typical encampments (which are often in rock shelters) consisting of two or three conjugal families.

The Hill Pandaram are an idiosyncratic people and place little emphasis on the formalisation of culture. Life-cycle rituals—puberty, marriage and funerary rites—are invariably celebrated without ceremony, and their religion is completely uniconic. Centred on the 'worship' of hill deities and ancestral spirits, which are contacted through possession states, their religious beliefs are vague, and it is difficult to discern any general agreement about the nature of these hill deities or life after death. As far as I could ascertain they have no myths and few magical rites, and although songs form an important aspect of their cultural life, these are personal and idiosyncratic. Many Hill Pandaram have several personal names, and few could remember the names of their grandparents. Certainly in all societies 'memorate knowledge'—knowledge based on personal experience—plays an important part in daily life but in Hill Pandaram society it seems to predominate. This is especially so with regard to taxonomic concerns, for these people seem to have an unsystematic and incomplete knowledge of the natural environment in which they live. They are of course excellent foresters, and have a detailed knowledge of the forest environment in respect of its geographical features, and with regard to the animals and plants which they seek—whether for food, building materials, trade or medicinal purposes. But though this knowledge is detailed it is gained mainly by personal experience and this means that not only are their taxonomic systems limited in scope but they have a relative unconcern with systematisation.³ Wandering through a forest tract with a Hill Pandaram (or sitting by the campfire with specimens) and attempting to ascertain the names of common animals and plants is a frustrating business. For either the Hill Pandaram claim that the plant or

animal has no name, or he gives the ethnographer what is essentially a descriptive or generic term, such as *parai chedi* (rock plant). And it seems, even on careful questioning, that he is unable to provide a more discriminating taxonomic term. In recent years there has been a marked advance in the study of ethnoscience, which attempts to map out, as it were, the cognitive structures of certain folk 'domains' i.e. classificatory systems (see Tyler 1969). There has also been a tendency, under the stimulus of Lévi-Strauss, to view folk classifications as on par with those of the biological sciences—that they are not comparable 'from a formal point of view' but substantially the same. This viewpoint is misleading for not only have folk taxonomies proved to be relatively 'shallow' but they are largely unconcerned with the less pragmatic aspects of the natural environment. For this reason invertebrate animals and the more primitive forms of plant life are rarely given taxonomic significance (see for instance Bulmer 1970). The attempt to outline and stress the fragmentary and unsystematic nature of Hill Pandaram classificatory schemas is done in relation and in contrast to the folk taxonomies of other societies, not in relation to the specific discriminations of biological taxonomy. I recall in particular my experience among the Alomwe people of southern Malawi and Mozambique when my interests were primarily in botanical studies. It was my practice when making collecting trips to the forest to take along a local guide, usually an acquaintance or a friend. And I was always struck by the wealth of knowledge and forest lore these agricultural people possessed for not only did almost every plant and animal have a specific name, but it could be given by even small children. Moreover, almost every plant had one or more uses, either as a food resource or for medicinal or ritual purposes, and these were known by the whole local community. I was therefore clearly taken aback on learning that certain common plants of the Ghats were not denoted by a common name in Hill Pandaram taxonomy. But what was more surprising was the fact that even where specific plants were referred to by a name or a generic term such as *parai chedi* (I lost count of the number of species which were subsumed under this taxon) the Hill Pandaram often could say nothing about its uses, either medicinally or otherwise. The suspicion the Hill Pandaram have of outsiders, and this extends equally to ethnographers, and their general reluctance to be talkative led me initially to feel that this seeming lack of knowledge was merely a function of the social inter-actional setting, and that in fact I was being misled by my general impressions. But in fact when I later became intimately associated, and on very friendly terms with specific families my initial assumptions seem to have been correct. The Hill Pandaram do not have a systematic knowledge of their natural environment as expressed in formalised taxonomies—comparable that is to that of many other cultures. I had neither the time nor the resources to make a detailed study of the whole biological domain but those aspects of their natural taxonomy which I did ascertain certainly validated my more general impressions. My assumptions were further validated however by two ethnographic accounts of societies similar to those I have just contrasted—that is the Alomwe and the Hill Pandaram. These are Gardner's account of the Paliyans and the Kriges' well known study of the Lovedu. This Bantu-speaking society has an agricultural system very similar to that of the matrilineal Alomwe and lives in a similar environment, even though the Alomwe system is more essentially one of shifting cultivation. Nevertheless what the Kriges write of Lovedu botanic lore

agrees substantially with my own experience among the Alomwe. For instance they write:

A whole volume could be written on the interest of the average man or woman in the flora alone. He knows a great deal about almost every plant. Even a herdboys . . . as we found in discussing our list of names of plants, could mention one or two practical uses of more than half of them . . . Speaking generally, and in terms of what is commonly known, we find that of 500 plants we have listed, 200 have mainly economic uses, building huts, thatching, making spoons . . . Over 100 are known more particularly for their edible roots or fruits, and 45 are greens or relishes; 230 are well-known in everyday medical pharmacopoeia and of these 60 are magical . . . (1965: 47-8).

Compare this with Gardner's account of the Paliyans who closely resemble the Hill Pandaram in almost every aspect of their cultural life. Gardner not only stressed the unformalised nature of Paliyan ideational patterns, remarking that they had no colour categories, but took Bernatzik's study of the Phi Tong Luang (1951) as a valid and illustrative example of individualistic culture he was describing (1966: 397-8). It will be remembered that Bernatzik not only considered this community to be incapable of abstract thought, but their language was deemed to be so elementary that it completely lacked names for different species of plants or animals. I have therefore clearly the task of dissociating my own account from such an extreme position. What I must endeavour to convey is the fact that the Hill Pandaram have unsystematic and, at the level of terminal taxa, incomplete taxonomies; for, as we shall see, they certainly have through their language, folk categories that systematise the natural environment.

The most fundamental categorisation in Hill Pandaram thought is embodied in the term *kattu* which means forest. According to context, it is usually employed in opposition to such entities as the low country—usually referred to as *natu*—the village, and the domestic spheres. The Hill Pandaram view themselves as belonging to the forest, and call all outsiders *nattukaran*—countrymen. But the term is used as a prefix to denote, for instance, a wild animal *kattu mrgam*—as opposed to domestic livestock—and many familiar birds, animals and plants have this prefix attached. When camping in the interior forest, often many miles from the nearest permanent habitations, the Hill Pandaram will say, when about to go on a collecting expedition '*kattupo*'—I'm going to the forest. This distinction between hill-forest and the cultivated plains is the fundamental and essentially the only environmental categorisation the Hill Pandaram make. Their taxonomic system therefore does not reflect any broad ecological divisions such as one finds among the Lele or in northern Thailand (Douglas 1954; Tambiah 1969). Nevertheless the terms *nadi* (river) and *mala* (mountain) serve as descriptive tags. Like ourselves the Hill Pandaram make a distinction between animals and plants. The term *jivikal* refers to living creatures but as far as I could make out it excludes plants as well as spiritual beings (*chāvu* and *devar*). The plant world, which seems not to be conjoined under a single generic term, comprises three main classes (*inam*). The first of these, *maram*, is often used to refer to the forest generally and in a sense to subsume the other two classes, but more specifically it refers to woody plants, and includes trees and shrubs. Lianas, however, together with climbers and creepers and even the rattan plant *chooral* (*Calamus* sp.) are placed under the taxon *valli* (or *kodi*). The remainder of the plant kingdom, consisting of epiphytes, ferns and herbaceous plants, is included

under the term *chedi* or small plant. All the plants I collected and questioned the Hill Pandaram about were categorised under these three primary taxa. Various species of bryophytes they found difficulty in classifying, and it seemed that fungi were not considered to belong, in any clear fashion, to any of the above taxa. The two main edible varieties of fungi were termed *ari* and *pey koon*, while all other varieties of fungi were labelled *kattil koon* (forest mushroom) or *mara koon* (for epiphytic fungi) or just simply *koon* (*kunnu*). Between these primary taxa and the specific terminal taxa there are certain generic terms or intermediate taxa. These embrace between two and about six specific taxa, and include such taxa as *pana* (palm-like trees), *channa* (ginger plants) and *punna* (*Calophyllum* spp.). There are in fact many intermediate taxa which unite two or three closely associated species, and which are separated by simple prefixes; for example *anjili* and *karanjili* (which refer to the trees *Artocarpus hirsuta* and *Dipterocarpus bourdillonii* respectively). But there are many terms which serve to unite a variety of plants, the principal ones being *kala* and *kurinji* (small herbaceous plants), *kulanga* or *kizhangu* (which refers to plants with conspicuous tubers—the term means root) and *mardāvu* (a taxa identified with certain epiphytic ferns). These however are loose categories and have no precise content. For the majority of common plants then there is but a standard name—the terminal taxa such as *menthonni* (*Gloriosa superba*)—the plant being incorporated only in the primary taxon, in this instance *chedi*. Thus with regard to plants the Hill Pandaram recognise three taxonomic levels, though the majority of species, as I have just remarked, are not subsumed under any intermediate taxa. There is therefore no systematic taxonomic hierarchy.

To illustrate the manner in which this nomenclature has—with reference to the lesser known species—something of an *ad hoc* nature and an idiosyncratic bias we may note certain features of their naming system. Accepting then, and this we have found to be the case in spite of Gardner's remarks on Paliyan taxonomic disputes, that the majority of the well-known plants have an agreed common name, we can turn to the manner in which the Hill Pandaram handle the more uncommon or rather less utilised plants of their environment. This can be done in two ways. Firstly by noting the fact that when the Hill Pandaram are asked to name a plant which may be familiar to them but which seemingly has no traditional name, they either state the fact or put it in a loose category of their own devising. Thus *parai chedi* was a term used to denote numerous plants that were common in the hill forests but which normally did not invoke the interest of the Hill Pandaram, until that is the ethnographer came along. It was a term that was given to me for many plants including the following; the orchid *Phyllomphax obcordata*, several plants of the family *Commelinaceae* and a *Begonia* sp. Similarly *kal tamara* (rock lotus) was a term given to several succulent arum-like plants growing on rocks, while the taxon *kurinji* was given to many slender herbs, especially *Acanthes*, as well as many flimsy ferns. Another general category was *vella kala* (water weed) which was given to many small plants growing on wet rocks, such as the Balsam *Impatiens scapiflora* and the straggling *Cyanotis axillaris*. We may note that many were not identified by the Hill Pandaram or were simply denoted by a primary taxon.

Secondly, I can denote the unsystematic nature of Hill Pandaram taxonomy by outlining the classification of a group of plants familiar to me, the *Orchidaceae*.⁴ About fifteen orchids were identified by myself—all being fairly common on rocks

and trees in the forests at the upper reaches of the Achencoil River—and some of these were categorised by the Hill Pandaram into the following taxa.

Species	Terminal taxa	Primary taxa
<i>Dendrobium hypeanum</i>	<i>para chedi</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Podochilus falcatus</i>	<i>nyali</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Pholodota pallida</i>	<i>kal maral</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Vanda testacea</i>	<i>mara vazha</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Sarcanthus peninsularis</i>	<i>paruva, mala chada</i>	<i>valli</i>
<i>Cottonia pendularis</i>	<i>kala chada</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Oberonia brunoniana</i>	<i>mala pasee</i>	<i>chedi</i>
<i>Dendrobium spp</i>	<i>kutti vala kalanga</i>	<i>chedi</i>

The important point is that the majority of these categories are loose taxa merely denoting 'rock plant' or 'tree plant' or 'creeper'. The term *vala* (or *vazha*) is normally applied to the wild plantain, while *kalanga* means root.

I turn now to the classification of animal life. Living creatures *jivikal* are subdivided into two categories, *janam* or human beings (*alukal* or *manushyanmar*) and *jantu*—animals. The second category is subdivided into five primary taxa; *min* (fish), *mrgam* (animals), *pakshi* (birds), *pambu* (snakes) and a residual category *puchi*, which includes insects, crustaceans and several other creatures. My main concern here is with the two main classes of land vertebrates, of which I made a fairly detailed study.⁵

The category *pakshi* (*patchi*) refers to animals that fly and besides birds includes several taxa of bats; as in the classification of plants this primary taxon embraces numerous terminal taxa, but has relatively few intermediate classes. The classification of birds thus does not form any neat hierarchy; moreover several intermediate taxa, i.e. *kili* and *kuruwi* are general terms which refer to small winged animals and birds generally and their composition is thus extremely variable. These two taxa seem to overlap some of the more basic intermediate categories. Of these the following are worthy of note here; *ponman* (kingfishers), *munga* (large owls), *nattu* (owlets), *prova* (doves), *kokku* (certain waterfowl), *prandu* (birds of prey), *tatta* (parakeets), and *vavval* (bats). Some general comments on the classification of *pakshi* (birds) seem however necessary. Firstly, the primary term itself is far from being rigid. For example many winged insects, particularly butterflies (*pakki*), locusts (*vitillu*) and grasshoppers (*tullan*) are often termed *pakshi*—which essentially means flying creature even though these insects are also referred to as *puchi*. In this case the terminal taxa belong to overlapping categories. Many dictionaries consider *pakki* and *pakshi* to be synonyms, but the Hill Pandaram use the former term in a limited sense only to refer to butterflies, and certain bird-species, for example *parai pakki*, the Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*) and *vanam pakki*, swifts and swallows (*vanam*=sky). On the other hand *pakshi* is a widely used category incorporating many taxa. Likewise there is some overlap between this category and the class *mrgam*. Both the flying squirrels *paran* (*Petaurista petaurista*) and *cheriya paran* (*Petinomys fuscocapillus*) are considered to belong to the class *mrgam*, and in fact an alternative name for the two species is *parayan*, which is a shortened version of *parayannan*—flying squirrel. But the smaller *paran* is also called *parava kiri* or *parava pakki*—*parakka* 'to fly'—*kili*

and *pakki*, as I have said, being general terms for flying creatures. A second feature of Hill Pandaram classification relates to the fact that many species, or rather terminal taxa, are referred to by several names. The commonest woodpecker for instance was called, on varying occasions, any one of the following terms: *kannan vyavan*, *periya vyavan*, *maramkotti*, and *kanna vyavan maramkotti*. When the writer was camping in Tenparai cave with a group of men, a teenage boy captured a small species of leaf-nosed bat (*Hipposideros* sp.). Before it was eaten I questioned the men on this animal and obtained three different names, all of which are widely used by the Hill Pandaram to refer to small bats—*cheri vavval*, *nyaru* and *ada kuruwi*. All agreed it was a *parakkam patchi* (*pakshi*). But although many common species have more than one name, the Hill Pandaram taxonomy as a whole is indiscriminating. Certain terminal taxa embrace several distinct species, and there is much 'lumping' of these categories. For instance *vanam pakki* (or *tyla*) includes all species of swifts and swallows, *irattalachi* covers not only the common Red-whiskered Bulbul but several other similar birds, while *nel kili* is a very general term for a host of small seed-eating birds—weavers and waxbills. Within the intermediate taxa distinctions usually are of the simplest kind; between *valiya* (large) and *cheriya* or *chinna* (small) varieties, or reference to colour is made. It must be noted that although 367 species of birds are described from Kerala (Salim Ali 1969) only a small proportion of these are common in the forested hills inhabited by the Hill Pandaram and many of these are confined to cultivations or to village environs which the community does not normally frequent. Moreover, an individual Hill Pandaram is likely to have personal experience with the limited number of birds which inhabit evergreen and deciduous forests. However, even given these qualifications, it is nevertheless worth stressing, as with the plant classifications, their idiosyncratic attitude towards taxonomy. Indeed the Hill Pandaram, generally speaking, have a disinterested attitude towards such matters, particularly towards the lesser known species. But although the degree of differentiation in taxonomies is often linked to the degree of pragmatic concern this does not seem to be the reason for the relative unconcern about classification the Hill Pandaram exhibit. Almost all *pakshi* are considered edible, and this applies particularly to the bats. Yet although the Hill Pandaram can describe in detail the numerous species of bats, and know a lot about their habits, they are categorised essentially into only two terminal taxa—*periya* and *cheriya vavval*. On the other hand the intermediate taxa *prandu*, which is considered inedible, arousing feelings of revulsion among some Hill Pandaram, is divided into six or more varieties. Let me summarise their classification of birds and allied creatures. Firstly, there are intermediate categories which subsume two or more terminal taxa. Usually the genus is common and widespread. Secondly, there are terminal taxa which vary in their degree of specificity; some (even though they may have synonyms) refer to specific species such as *katta kindi*, the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*); others are more generalised categories, such as *nel kili* or *nel kuruwi* and include several biological species. Unlike plants the Hill Pandaram give a name, no matter how generalised it may be, to every bird encountered in the forest. The same may be said of species belonging to the taxon *mrgam* to which I now finally turn.

The category *mrgam* includes not only all known species of mammals (with the notable exception of the *chiroptera*) but several of the larger species of reptiles. It

excludes however snakes (*pambu*) and smaller reptiles and amphibia which are normally referred to, if categorised at all, as *puchi*. The four reptiles included in this taxa are *ama*, the land tortoise (*Testudo travancorica*), *valli*, the monitor lizard (*Varanus monitor*)—both of which are eaten—and the two species of crocodile *mudala* and *chingani*, the vernacular terms for *Crocodylus porosus* and *C. palustris* respectively. Both the last two reptiles are rare and the writer had no sight records of these creatures during his fieldwork, though they were familiar to the Hill Pandaram. In contrast to the classification of 'birds' there is a close correspondence between Hill Pandaram animal taxonomy and the biological delineation of natural species. Although there are some instances of lumping—for example *chen keeri* appears to embrace two similar mongooses, the Ruddy Mongoose (*Herpestes smithii*) and the striped-necked Mongoose (*Herpestes vitticollis*), while *chen nai* is often used to describe the jackal as well as the wild dog—there are no generalising concepts such as we find for birds. The correspondence between the terminal taxa and biological species is in fact fairly precise—some 80 per cent. of Hill Pandaram categories being equivalents. But there are in addition three instances of 'splitting' where a biological category subsumes two terminal taxa. The first of these is a little unclear owing to varying opinions. Being bilingual there is some variation in the terms the Hill Pandaram employ in categorising animals and plants. This only partly accounts for the use of synonyms, for in vocabulary there is an essential similarity between Tamil and Malayalam. Consider for instance the following:

Species	Tamil	Malayalam
Pig	<i>Pandri</i>	<i>Panni</i>
Hare	<i>muyel</i>	<i>muyal</i>
Bandicoot	<i>perichali</i>	<i>perichazhi</i>
Otter	<i>neer keeri</i>	<i>neer nai</i>
Bat	<i>vaval</i>	<i>vavval</i>
Elephant	<i>yana</i>	<i>ana</i>
Shrew	<i>sund eli</i>	<i>chunteli</i>
Jackal	<i>nuree</i>	<i>kurukan</i>
Dhole	<i>chen nai</i>	<i>chen nai</i>
Squirrel	<i>annil</i>	<i>annan</i>

These terms were taken from standard Tamil and Malayalam dictionaries. (In listing in the above paragraphs the names of animals and plants I have given only the terms used by the Hill Pandaram themselves, and have not sought to trace their linguistic derivation.) Now in the Achencoil village there are two terms to denote the tiger, *kaduwa*, which is of Malayalam derivation, and *puli* which is the common Tamil term. Most Hill Pandaram, like the plainsmen, consider these to be synonyms. However one Hill Pandaram considered that *kaduwa* and *puli* (or *pulli*) were distinct 'species', the latter being characterised by its smaller size and yellowish coloration. The two other cases involving 'splitting' are explicable in terms of colour variations within the species. *Pullipulli* and *karim pulli* refer to the leopard (*Panthera pardus*), the latter taxon referring to a dark variety which, it is alleged, is particularly fond of dogs. *Kozhi mullan* is distinguished terminologically from the porcupine *mullan panni*, being a reddish colour phase of the species.

The various taxa constituting the primary taxon *mrgam* are distinguished by

TABLE 1. Taxon: Mrgam.

<i>Hill Pandaram category</i>	<i>English term</i>	<i>Scientific nomenclature</i>
Kaduwa	tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i> (L)
Pullipulli	leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i> (L)
Karimpulli		as above; a dark variety
Kazhuta pulli	striped hyena	<i>Hyanna hyaena</i> (L)
Kattu pucha	jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i> Gulgenstaedt.
Marapatti	palm civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i> (Pallas)
Veru	Indian civet	<i>Viverricula indica</i> (Desmarest)
Vitu nai	domestic dog	
Chen nai	dhole	<i>Cuon alpinus</i> (Pallas)
Kurukan	jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i> (L)
Neer nai	otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i> (L)
Murra nai	Nilgiri marten	<i>Martes gwatkinsi</i> Horsfield
Keeri	common mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsi</i> (Geoffrey)
Chen keeri	ruddy mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i> Gray
	striped-necked mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i> Bennett
Karin Keeri	Nilgiri brown mongoose	<i>Herpestes fuscus</i> Waterhouse (?)
Kala man	four horned antelope	<i>Tetracerus quadricornis</i> (Blainville) (?)
Kattu man (pottu)	Indian bison	<i>Bos gaurus</i> H. Smith
Mlāvu	sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i> Kerr
Pulli man	spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i> (Erxleben)
Kezha man	muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i> (Zimmerm)
Kuran	chevrotain	<i>Travulus meminna</i> (Erxleben)
Kurangu	Bonnet macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i> (Geoffrey)
Manthi	Milgiri langur	<i>Presbytis johni</i> (Fischer)
Chingalum	Lion tailed macaque	<i>Macaca silenus</i> (L)
Malayanṇan	Giant squirrel	<i>Rafusa indica</i> (Erxleben)
Cheriyannan	Striped squirrels	<i>Fumanbulus sublineatus</i> (Waterh.) and F. Palmarum (L)
Paran	flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista petaurista</i> (Elliott)
Cheriyā paran	Travancore forest squirrel	<i>Petinomys fuscicapillus</i> (Jerdon)
Chūnd eli	grey musk shrew	<i>Suncus murinus</i> (L)
Mull eli	Malabar spiny mouse	<i>Platacanthomys lasiurus</i>
Vell eli	field mouse	<i>Mus booduga</i> (gray)
		<i>Rattus rattus</i> (L)
Mara eli	white-tailed rat	<i>Rattus blandfordi</i> (Thomas)
Perichazhi	bandicoot rat	<i>Bandicota indica</i> (Bechstein)
Panni	wild pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i> L.
Mullan panni	porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i> Kerr
Kozhi mullan	as above; a reddish phase	
Tavangu	slender loris	<i>Loris tardigradus</i> (L)
Karadi	sloth bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i> (Shaw)
Moyal	black naped hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i> Cuvier
Āna	elephant	<i>Elaphus maximus</i> (L)
Ama	land tortoise	<i>Testudo travancorica</i>
Valli	Indian monitor	<i>Varanus monitor</i>
Mudala	estuarine crocodile	<i>Crocodilus porosus</i>
Chingani	marsh crocodile	<i>Crocodilus palustris</i>
Atu	Nilgiri tahr	<i>Hemitragus hylocrius</i> (Ogilby)
Alangu	Indian pangolin	<i>Manis crassicaudata</i> Gray

(For taxonomic purposes I have followed the scientific denotations given in Prater (1965) which is a standard work.)

multiple criteria. The principal classificatory schema is denoted above (fig. 1). The term *mrgam* seems to refer to four-footed land animals. Some of the smaller reptiles for instance *ōndu*, *palli* and *arana* are sometimes described as *mrgam*, but normally they seem to be excluded from the primary taxon. In Malayalam the term *nalkali* is occasionally used to signify a quadruped. However I never heard this word being spoken by the Hill Pandaram. But they do utilise categories which in a sense overlap the primary classification outlined. For instance I heard the following denotations—the hare was termed a *nattu mrgam* (plains animal), the otter a *nadi mrgam* (river animal) while on one occasion the monitor lizard was described as a *parai mrgam* (rock animal). But as the majority of mammals encountered were forest animals such a classification was not articulated in any definite form.

I have briefly outlined above the Hill Pandaram system of animal and plant classification, and have tried to indicate the limitations of their taxonomies and their general unconcern about such matters. It is also evident from what I write that the Hill Pandaram, like other cultures, have a fairly detailed taxonomic system which orders the natural world. Indeed I am highly sceptical of the notion that some societies (for instance the Phi Tong Luang as described by Bernatzik (1951)) lack names for different species of animals and plants. But the important point is that these systems of classification, though employed idiosyncratically by individual Hill Pandaram, constitute a cultural domain which is largely independent of other aspects of Hill Pandaram culture. The community, as far as I could ascertain, had no mythological systems relating either to the Hill Pandaram deities or to the natural world, and even historical traditions of origin seem to have been absent. In Krishna Iyer's social history of Kerala (1968) it is indeed significant that the Hill Pandaram are conspicuously absent from the chapter dealing with folk traditions, although a brief account of the traditions of almost every other South Indian hill tribe is given. Not only is there little orientation towards mythological elaboration but the Hill Pandaram animal (and plant) categories have little symbolic import. Their orientation towards natural phenomena therefore is essentially pragmatic. There are no elaborate systems of augury; animals and plants are not utilised in any ritual procedures or ceremonial (ashes, betel leaf and various colouring powders bought locally are the substances involved in what little ritual they do have) and there are no totemic systems, as far as I could ascertain. But the Hill Pandaram do have specific dietary prohibitions associated with certain animal species—and it is to a discussion of these that I now turn.

III

In her work *Purity and danger* Douglas proposed a theoretical perspective similar to that of Lévi-Strauss, in the sense that she saw primitive cultures as having an 'undifferentiated' world view. As she put it 'We moderns operate in many different fields of symbolic action. For . . . many primitive cultures the field of symbolic action is one' (1966: 68). A derivative of this general perspective is the notion that pollution beliefs and food 'taboos' make sense only by reference to a society's total structure of thought, dietary prohibitions reflecting the 'anomalous' status of specific categories in the classificatory system. I have elsewhere expressed dis-

satisfaction with this theoretical schema, for not only does Douglas fail to discriminate, like Lévi-Strauss, between folk classifications that order specific domains and the symbolic (implicit) classifications which, as 'unformulated categories', order different levels of experience, but her own analyses of the Lele and Leviticus data seem unsatisfactory as illustrative material for her thesis.⁶ However, in relating dietary prohibitions explicitly to the way in which people conceptually and symbolically structure their environment Douglas struck a rich theoretical vein, and has offered suggestions that antedate in many respects the perspectives of Lévi-Strauss. Where her analysis goes somewhat astray is in the moving of its focus to the level of 'terminological' classifications, for, as we shall see below there seems to be no simple relationship between such classifications and dietary prohibitions. An earlier ethnographer had the following short note on Hill Pandaram diet:

Among animals they are fond of sambar, wild boar, black monkey, jungle squirrel, wild pigeon and wildfowl. They do not eat the flesh of bison, white monkey or tortoise. They say that it would provoke the anger of the gods to do so (Iyer 1937: 113).

My own researches did not indicate that the tortoise was a prohibited food among the Hill Pandaram I encountered (nor did they eat wild pig); in fact this reptile was an important item in their diet. But as there is some variation among the Hill Pandaram as to what constitutes forbidden food I am reluctant to dismiss Krishna Iyer's observations out of hand, especially as much of his ethnography has proved to be valid. The animal species which the Hill Pandaram do not eat under any circumstances are in fact fairly numerous. The most noteworthy is the elephant, which is held in veneration not only by the Hill Pandaram but by almost all communities of South India. Equally important are the carnivorous animals; with a few notable exceptions none of these is eaten by the community, and this includes the tiger, striped hyena, India wild dog, otter and jackal, as well as the smaller species of cat and mongoose families. There is some dispute over whether the leopard is a 'tabooed' animal; for some Hill Pandaram are said to eat it. But while the *veru* (Small Indian civet) is definitely not eaten by the Hill Pandaram with whom I lived (although it is commonly eaten by low caste communities) the allied species *marapatti*, the common palm civet or toddy cat is often eaten. Similarly there is some dispute as to whether the *karadi* (Sloth bear) is deemed to be edible; although eaten by some Hill Pandaram others consider it to be strictly forbidden meat, and will not touch it. Moving now to the non-carnivorous species the following more important animals are considered inedible; nilgiri tahr, wild pig, Indian bison, hare, bonnet macaque and slender loris. An important point to note here is that all these species are eaten by members of low caste communities, and this includes especially the two common species, the wild pig and white monkey. Two species of the common 'white' monkey seemed to be included under the taxon *kurangu*, and although this animal is held in veneration by the Indian community generally, and tolerated everywhere (no doubt because of its association with the deity Hanuman) many members of the lower castes capture this animal if the opportunity arises. Both the hare and the loris are found in dry forest areas, and are therefore only infrequently seen by the Hill Pandaram, although they are familiar with the animals. The tahr and bison are no longer found in the area inhabited by the Hill Pandaram—though they are still to be found north of Sabari-

mala temple. It is worth noting that the ibex (*tahr*) is reported by Mateer (1883) as having been trapped by the Hill Pandaram in the past. Most of the older men however assert that this species was not considered suitable food, and for this reason it has been listed above. With the exception of the taxon *eli* (which includes rats and shrews) and the species I have mentioned above, all other species of mammals are considered by the Hill Pandaram to be edible game, and this includes bats.

Turning now to prohibited categories among the birds, we tend to find the same patterning, namely some birds are considered inedible, others have ambiguous or disputed status, while the remainder—the majority in fact—are considered edible. Of the first category, the *ukkan*, the crow pheasant, the jungle crows, and the numerous varieties of the taxon *prandu*, which includes eagles, falcons, buzzards and kites, are all considered inedible, and are never eaten by the Hill Pandaram. Such common birds as the *maramkotti*, the golden-backed woodpecker, the *karukuruwi*, racket-tailed drongo and the *irrattalachi*, the red-whiskered bulbul being its primary referent, are eaten by some Hill Pandaram but others decline to capture them. Earlier writers inferred that the Hill Pandaram ate practically everything they could lay their hands on, taking 'rats, snakes and even crocodiles from the pools in the hills'. They were credited also with eating carrion, and driving wild dogs from their kill. I found no evidence of the Hill Pandaram eating carrion, nor, with the exception of the tortoise and monitor lizard, any species of reptile or amphibian. Invertebrate life generally, again with notable exceptions like the larvae of certain wasps and bees, was totally ignored in their dietary considerations.

Although Krishna Iyer wrote that the transgression of specific food prohibitions provoked the anger of the hill deities, my own researches revealed no clear association between dietary restrictions and religious or mystical conceptions. The Hill Pandaram could provide no beliefs or reasons as to why specific animals were not eaten; merely suggesting that it was customary not to do so. One old man Daniskody informed me that if the possession dancer (*tullakaran*) ate the prohibited animals then this would anger the deities, but nevertheless he reiterated that the dietary restrictions were merely traditional norms. Questions relating to specific animals evoked varying responses according to the species, either laughter, revulsion or indifference. Often the suggestion was made that if the animal was eaten it would cause sickness or illness, but this was seen in essentially empirical terms rather than as a mystical retribution for a 'taboo' transgression. Indeed the term 'taboo' in this context is something of a misnomer, for no mystical or supernatural sanctions were felt to be involved—the prohibited animals were simply not eaten. It is therefore extremely difficult to delineate or to describe an animal species as a 'tabooed' category.⁷

The Hill Pandaram do not eat pig, bison and white monkey (to name three of the mammals considered inedible); nor do they eat kites, or frogs, or beetles or forest worms. But they appear to make no distinction between these categories; nor are pollution rules invoked such as would enable us to demarcate a specific category of tabooed animals. If we are to consider dietary prohibitions as having symbolic significance then we must conclude that in the Hill Pandaram case no folk criteria are available to enable us to delimit those species among the inedible categories which may have symbolic import.

With Douglas's hypothesis in mind it will be evident if reference is made again

to figure 1, that the taxonomy appears to have little or no relationship to the class of animals that are considered inedible. The prohibited animals are found in most of the intermediate taxa, two of these taxa—*pulli* and *keeri*—consisting only of prohibited categories. It would be difficult from the ethnographic data to ascertain exactly how these inedible categories could be described as taxonomic ‘anomalies’ as they are members of specific classes. Of interest is the fact that most of the animals described by Douglas as anomalous are in fact eaten by the Hill Pandaram; bat, pangolin, monitor lizard, porcupine and tortoise. But there is one taxon which can undoubtedly be described as anomalous in Hill Pandaram terms—and that is the *paran* or flying squirrel. Indeed the Hill Pandaram express genuine puzzlement as to whether this creature is a *mrgam* or a *pakshi*; and invariably decide that it is both. But even if we grant it anomalous status according to their taxonomy it hardly supports the aforementioned thesis—for the *paran* too is eaten by the community. I must conclude then that the status of animals that are prohibited as food by the Hill Pandaram cannot be explicated by reference to their folk taxonomic system. And in the seeming absence of totemic, symbolic or unconscious classifications that may serve to unite their animal taxonomy with wider concerns or social patterns, my response to Douglas’s hypothesis can only be a negative one. Likewise only a negative response can be made to Leach’s (1964) postulated homology between marriage categories (social structure) and the form of animal classification. For although the Hill Pandaram have a Dravidian type of kinship system which categorises a person’s social world into clearly defined social divisions—terminological ‘kinsmen’ ‘affines’ and outsiders (*nattukuran*), there was, as far as I could ascertain no homology (or connexion) between this social classification and their animal taxonomy.

My research findings have thus led me to conclude that the Hill Pandaram do not have any systematic elaboration of culture (or ritual symbolism) such as one finds among the Zuni, Bororo and many other cultures; nor are their various ‘classificatory’ systems linked together by any conceptual schema. In the words which Lévi-Strauss (1966: 232) applied to modern industrial societies there is among the Hill Pandaram—and certain other hunter-gathering societies it would appear—a ‘totemic void’.

NOTES

¹ The ‘savage mind’ is by no means restricted to pre-literate cultures, as is often implied. Indeed, the elaboration and systematisation of culture, especially in the development of complex symbolic classifications, seems to be particularly associated with early agrarian civilisations, e.g. the Aztec, Tamil and Chinese cultures.

² Research among the Hill Pandaram was undertaken between June 1972 and July 1973, and was supported by research grants from the Social Science Research Council and the Horniman Trust. To these agencies I am grateful. I would also like to acknowledge here the help and theoretical stimulus I have received from James Woodburn, and the support given to me in the field by E. N. Bhaskaran of the Kerala Forest Service.

³ Detailed studies of folk classifications indicate that folk taxa greatly outnumber the ‘scientific’ taxa, and the conclusion therefore may be drawn that my own data are incomplete or superficial. All cultures of course (and not just scientists) have elaborate classificatory systems; this is a point hardly worth arguing. But they vary in their complexity, and though specific aspects of natural domains may be highly elaborated, it is simply not true that folk taxonomies are more complex than scientific ones. Folk taxonomies (including our own) have relatively shallow hierarchies—the Karam and Hill Pandaram have only three levels—and many phylums and classes, for example the invertebrates (insects, spiders and crustacea) and the non-flowering

plants (ferns, bryophytes, lichens and fungi) which include a large proportion of the known biological species, are very loosely systematised, if at all. Moreover, the elaborate systematisation ('splitting') of specific species invariably pertains (as again with our own folk classifications) to domestic and cultivated types.

⁴ It has been suggested that I imply that our biological classification is somehow superior to the Hill Pandaram taxonomies. I am not here concerned with the relative worth of taxonomies. My stress on biological classifications no doubt stems from my own personal interests in natural history, and I would consequently find it difficult to examine Hill Pandaram taxonomy exclusively 'in its own right'.

⁵ My reference to dictionaries might throw doubt on my knowledge and understanding of the local language. I explicitly acknowledged in my doctoral thesis that after a year's study in the field I did not consider my knowledge of Hill Pandaram dialect to be sufficient to obtain the sort of data I required, and that I could only express my admiration for scholars like Firth and Schebesta who learnt a tribal language in three or four months. But I had a fair knowledge of the language and could talk and converse with Hill Pandaram directly about taxonomic matters. My knowledge of local cultural discriminations therefore is not entirely superficial—though my language limitations, and the idiosyncratic nature of Hill Pandaram responses towards my questioning render any statements I have made tentative. Such phrases like 'as far as I can ascertain' should have indicated this. My use of dictionaries relates to the fact that the Hill Pandaram speak a dialect of Malayalam, and I was concerned to differentiate *their* system of classification from that of the local villagers who speak something approaching standard Malayalam.

⁶ See my unpublished critique 'Animals, anomalies and abominations' (1972).

⁷ I am aware that I do not make any distinction between animal categories that are 'inedible' and those which are 'taboo'—edible but prohibited. Although the Hill Pandaram have different attitudes towards specific categories, such a distinction has no meaning in the Hill Pandaram context. In fact I am very dubious whether the category 'taboo' has any analytical usefulness.

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